



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Houghton, Kirralie](#), [Foth, Marcus](#), & [Miller, Evonne](#)
(2015)

Urban acupuncture: Hybrid social and technological practices for hyper-local placemaking.

Journal of Urban Technology, 22(3), pp. 3-19.

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The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Journal of Urban Technology*, 02 October 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/10630732.2015.1040290>

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2015.1040290>

Urban Acupuncture: Hybrid Social and Technological Practices for Hyperlocal Placemaking

ABSTRACT

This paper considers an emerging planning practice that utilises networked connections to interact with urban places and re-create enlivened cities. The paper presents urban acupuncture as a new planning approach that broadens communication and strategically targets interventions across the city. Defined as an approach that through the use of digital social networks and interactions, involves citizens and planners in place activations in order to stimulate and reinvigorate place. Thus creating meaningful relationships within urban settings. This paper uses the UR[BNE] Brisbane Festival 2012 as a qualitative case study of urban acupuncture, best defined as a hyper-localised healing treatment through place activation to enliven and recreate cities. It examines the challenges faced and opportunities embraced by a network of urban professionals. Their aim was to activate the underused urban spaces of central Brisbane through the festival's activities and events. The findings identify the key elements required to design public spaces using socially and technologically networked interactions.

KEYWORDS: *Urban acupuncture; urban planning; place activation; urban informatics, digitally networked, social interactions,*

1. Introduction

Globally decision-makers and planners, are grappling with the best ways to create habitable, efficient and desirable urban areas whilst managing significant population growth. The future sustainability and prosperity of cities will depend on the planning decisions made now to prepare for growth, with critical decisions needing to be made about how best to revitalise, enliven and re-create urban areas (Vassigh & vom Hove, 2012). At the same time decision-makers search for better ways to involve and engage community members in a more participatory responses to urban planning decision-making processes.

Urban decision makers, are often confronted with the competing interests of the community, politics, and various stakeholders' needs. They must balance multiple viewpoints to best serve the needs of the city and its citizens. Finding the most strategic and effective interventions, which make a real difference in communities, can often be illusive and/or, contentious (Rydin, 2003). Developing responsive environments that reflect their population's aspirations, and which are healthy and livable, requires community engagement and the development of an ongoing community dialogue. As John Rau, the current deputy premier of South Australia, argues:

Engagement is critical. Engagement is something that can catalyse the many disparate thoughts of individuals in the community, bringing them together into something meaningful, which can be developed for the benefit of the whole community. (5000+, 2012)

In an age of networked interactions, there are new digital technologies that the planning profession can utilise to connect and engage with citizens. Digital Technologies and their various applications, such as social media tools (Evans-Cowley, 2010b; Fredericks & Foth, 2013) have the potential to reshape the planning process, allowing communities to convey the meaning of places in their lives, and actively engage in helping shape their urban environments (Evans-Cowley, 2010b; Shin & Shin, 2012). Shin and Shin (2012) suggest that 'community informatics' be integrated into urban planning in a conceptual framework they call 'community informatics – supporting new urbanism' (p.35). While their work theorises about the potential link between urban planning and ICT, it stops short of describing conversation and value of the hybridisation of digital and physical space. Evans-Cowley (2010a) examined the role of social media in planning communications. She found a trend to use social media in citizen-initiated action against planned developments, however it had little impact on planning decisions. In spite of capabilities of interactive communications technologies, planning communication still tends to be mono-directional supplying information from local government it may involve some responding public views, but often a very limited amount of discussion or debate (Evans-Cowley, 2010a; Williamson & Parolin, 2012).

Utilising the affordances of digital media in positive ways for planners and communities has received less academic attention. Specifically the consideration of how a hybrid approach (of digital and physical spaces interacting), can be utilised in a hyper-local way to re-create,

enliven, and activate space. Consideration of positive ways planners can be involved in the digital conversations with each other and community leaves a knowledge gap. Such activities pose significant questions for the future direction of planning and the design of new urban technology, although knowledge about how urban technology and planning might work together remains nascent.

This study is designed to contribute to addressing the knowledge gap. Using the UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival 2012 in Brisbane, Queensland, as a qualitative case study, this study explores how urban planners and designers can engage in networked activities and use social media to help re-create and enliven city spaces. This research explores the potential of a new therapeutic approach to planning and urban re-creation: urban acupuncture, which is a hyper-localised healing treatment facilitated through digital technology for place activation to enliven and re-create cities. Designed to stimulate the city through planning and/or community guided activities in a process of reinvigorating underutilised, leftover or non-functioning spaces. It asks the following questions:

- Can urban technology and social media that enable digital networked interactions of citizens, dynamically affect the development and design of public spaces? If so, what elements need to be considered to develop and maintain these networks?
- How do these networks function within the formal structures of the planning profession in order to enhance urban places?

The principles and values of the planning profession frame the discussion, addressing the particular the role of communication and participation in planning for urban environments, and the contribution of various social media networks.

Evolving planning values

Urban planning focuses on the spatial relationships, land-use and activity across a city. It impacts on the lives and wellbeing of inhabitants, while attempting to influence and respond to the many stakeholders and their complex array of needs, desires and investments.

Underlying principles of social equity and the good governance of places, citizen participation has been an integral value in planning practice since the 1960s. There has been a shift in urban planning models from the representative style of the 1960's and 70's, to the

participatory models of the 1980's (Laurian & Shaw, 2009). The communicative planning theories and new public management have been more prevalent from the 1980's to now (Healey 2012; Sager 2009).

For planners, there has been an ongoing tension between the values of communication and inclusion, and the drive for a market-driven, efficient economic management systems on the other (Sager, 2009). Sager (2009) describes the conflicting values of *Communicative Planning Theory* (CPT) and *New Public Management* (NPM) approaches to governance: CPT's focus is on multi-dimensional dialogues, and NPM uses a one-dimensional economic approach. According to Sager (2009), planners' work is tied closely with the communicative and personal value system of openness, inclusion, responsiveness to other parties' affection, the right to freedom of speech, justice, and bureaucratic neutrality.

The neo-liberal NPM approach claims that market and business rationales can be used for operating government agencies, including planning departments, with economic efficiency driving decision-making processes. The NPM and CPT approaches can be in conflict with each other: one aims for economic efficiency as its highest value and the other the process of communication (with its own implementation costs), balance and compromise (thus challenging the planners approach, decisions, and outcomes).

A CPT approach more readily allows for multiple voices and interests to be heard within the planning process and the discovery of new ways of approaching urban issues. It aligns more easily with planning values, accommodating a view that planning is more than the regulation of land use and direction of development, but rather also including processes of directing and guiding the spatial relationships between people and their environment. A collaborative, people centered, planning process as suggested in Friedmann's (2010) discussion of placemaking, adopts this approach.

It is within the context of these competing values of NPM and CPT that modern planners practice. Finding ways to reduce the cost of effective community communications can be supported by the developments and innovations of digital technology. New digital technologies provide ways to create more informal, grassroots actions to activate and enliven cities. Concerns of 'culture, consciousness, community and 'placeness' (Healey, 1992) can be addressed within the CPT based approach, but must clearly be part of a planning process and philosophy to be effective.

Place activation – a planning priority

One of the key areas of consideration for planners is the impact of the development of physical building and the shaping of public places. The connotation of the term *place* is more than a physical space. It is about the meaning and connection people have with that environment (Cresswell, 2004; Tuan, 2001). There are strong connections between social capital and the development of a sense of place (which includes a sense of belonging), documented in the work of many theorists, including Goffman (1963), Jacobs (1961), Gehl (2006), Putnam (2001), and Oldenburg (1989). Others have detailed the extensive arguments about what social capital is, and what it is not (Blumberg, Peiro & Roe, 2012; Middleton, Murie & Groves, 2005; Putnam, 2001). However, the argument is established on the basis that social capital, found in the trust and networks that exist in communities. Social capital is essential for the effective functioning (Middleton et al., 2005) and the development of meaningful places (Jacobs, 1961). Ensuring that public places are active and engaging, maintaining their priority for planners and urban decision-makers. It requires the involvement and engagement of a broad range of citizens (the local residents) to be effective and sustainable (Friedmann, 2010). Using hyper-local actions to connect people with place, and in place, create energy and interest in both place and community, drawing a comparison to the urban acupuncture treatment that is the focus of this study.

Urban Acupuncture – an emerging practice

The concept of urban acupuncture borrows part of its name from ancient Chinese medicine. An analogy can be made between the work of acupuncturists and the urban planner (or community members) who target local points of influence, release a flow of energy, and thus, have a healing or ‘energising’ effect on the larger urban space or the whole city (Pascaris, 2012).

Proponents argue that urban revitalisation must begin at the hyper-local level (de Monchaux, 2010; Mehaffy, 2012; Pascaris, 2012; Shidan, 2010; Tortosa, Vicent, Zamora & Oliver, 2010), and they advocate a targeted (small-scale) approach to ‘healing’ the (large-scale) malady of urban decay. They argue that large-scale revitalisation projects are both less effective and increasingly less feasible as municipal budgets tighten.

The as yet limited academic review of urban acupuncture has focused either on individual architecture elements (de Monchaux, 2010), or in the case of Shidan (2010), on the technical side of information systems such as spatial data mining techniques, geographical information systems, aerial photography, remote sensing technology, and virtual reality. From a planning perspective, there has been little or no discussion of urban technology and social media used for an urban acupuncture style process within the context of communicative planning theory. The concept of urban acupuncture for planners, which uses urban technology to generate energy, interest, and social knowledge, is the focus of this research.

The use of digital tools from social media to build community (and social capital) is also an emerging field of exploration (Evans-Cowley, 2010b; Foth, Klaebe & Hearn, 2008; Halpern, 2005; Shin & Shin, 2012). Foth et al. (2008) focus on the role that digital narratives can play in planning processes. They argue that these new social media tools have the potential to aid participation in the urban planning process, thus empowering the community in relation to their own environment (Evans-Cowley, 2010b; Fredericks & Foth, 2013; Schroeter & Houghton, 2011). Odendaal's (2006) examination of the South African experience suggests that using digital tools, such as those embedded in social media, provides a means of understanding the lived experience of urban residents from culturally and socio-economically diverse backgrounds. Odendaal and colleagues further suggest that these tools can give voice to marginalised people by incorporating ways of knowing for planning processes beyond formal reports and documents (Foth, Odendall & Hearn, 2007). In this way, urban technology has the capacity to enhance democracy because it broadens communication and the dissemination of information.

This paper considers a case study of a specific urban acupuncture treatment organised by a group of urban planners and incorporating other design professionals. It examines the potential of the group and its effectiveness in revitalising underused areas of inner-city Brisbane. Evaluating the influences of urban acupuncture actions on policy and the process of planning the City's future.

2. *Methodology*

Seeking to create a rich representation of the UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival the case study method (Yin, 2003) was used. As Table 7.1 illustrates the research involved a series of data collection methods to explore the issues within the context of this festival in a

multifaceted way and retains ‘the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events and situations’ (Yin 2003, p. 18). The University Human Research Ethics Committee provided ethical clearance, and participants were briefed on the research and their rights before consenting to be interviewed.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods

Interviews	Organisers of UR[BNE]	Recorded semi-structured one-hour interviews with two of the key festival organisers
Participant observation	Ideas Café Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumbler	Attended UR[BNE] workshops, and monitored and participated in the group’s online social networks
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook • Twitter • Tumbler • Photos • Video Footage • Flyers & program 	Collected and analysed data from two sources: the UR[BNE] group’s own publications and postings, and online articles written by journalists

The research sought answers to key questions, both in the interviews and the analysis of other data. These included:

- How did the use of social media support and develop the UR[BNE] Festival and Design Collective?
- What were the issues that arose through the use of social media?
- Was there a relationship between the digital and physical spaces?
- Did the festival have an impact on Brisbane and the design of its public urban spaces?
- Within the formal structures of planning how do these networks function to enhance urban places?

In response to these questions and the data analysis, the case study narrative of the experience associated with the UR[BNE] Festival and Design Collective developed.

Case Study: Brisbane UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival 2012

The Brisbane UR[BNE] Festival 2012 was run by the UR[BNE] Design Collective¹. Brisbane is located in South East Queensland, one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. Population projections estimate growth from 2.8 million people in 2006 to 4.6 million in 2031, equating to an additional 70,600 people each year (ABS, 2011a; Office of Economic and Statistical Research, 2011). This growth rate puts pressure on the city to provide sustainable, attractive, and enlivened spaces.

The UR[BNE] design collective and festival provided examples of events and discussions that happened in both digital and physical ways. This interaction highlights the hybridization of city spaces as digital layers interact with physical spaces for the purpose of placemaking. The UR[BNE] Festival sought to implement hyper-local treatments through the underutilised spaces of the city utilising both physical and digital interventions, a month long urban acupuncture program for Brisbane.

The UR[BNE] Festival is an initiative spearheaded by three young professionals (two urban designers and a community planner) who wanted to improve the quality and use of places within Brisbane. They shared a professional interest in placemaking as a tool for enlivening cities, as a means of contextualising the spatial elements of the city. Looking at ways to develop community and a sense of place simultaneously, UR[BNE] Festival sought to create new social spaces and new ways to relate to spaces.

The UR[BNE] Collective was inspired by a number of other festivals from around the world, including those in New York, Brussels, Melbourne, London, Milan, and Amsterdam. The collective's direction is guided by its goal:

... to bring together all manner of creative professionals, students and community members who want to contribute to a positive change in Brisbane's urban environment. By means of arts projects, campaigns and debate we seek to encourage individuals, businesses and neighbours to become involved in actions that will trigger change in our city. We offer a framework in which experience, contacts and information can be shared, a forum to discuss, spread the word, and support the specific projects that activist groups or individuals have organised throughout South East Queensland. (UR{BNE}, 2012)

¹ <http://www.facebook.com/urbne.festival/>

Embracing a grassroots approach towards place activation and planning, the UR[BNE] Design Collective was a community run initiative, independent of government bodies, although there was some small sponsorship or donations towards individual projects. While many of its members were professional planners and designers, there were no prerequisites for membership. It attracted many friends and associates who were interested in the activities and future direction of their city. The festival was the group's major activity, and its vision for the festival events was to spark interest in creating ongoing activities beyond the festival. (As discussed below, this was successfully demonstrated with the Lazy Sunday Rides and the Style over Speed events, both holding additional events beyond the festival.)

In establishing the timing for the festival, the organisers saw an advantage in connecting with a number of other events, particularly the Australian Institute of Architects conference that was also held in Brisbane in May 2012. They intended to create synergy around these events and to draw attention to the festival's events. The following Table 7.2 lists the activities connected to the festival from their official program, capturing events and activities during the month of May that celebrate Brisbane's urban spaces, community and urban design.

Table 2: UR[BNE] Festival 2012 Activities

Activity	Date and Description	Location and Date
Triumph of the city: a debate – Griffith University (Urban Research Program)	Wednesday 2 May	Griffith University - Nathan campus
Edible Street Tour – PermaBlitz	Sunday 6 May	West End Brisbane
UR[BNE] films – 4 Films over the month State Library of QLD	Inception - Sunday 6 May Radiant City - Sunday 13 May NY77 – Sunday 20 May Blade Runner Sunday 27 May	SLQ Auditorium SLiQ Flicks Asia Pacific Design Library
High Speed Rail Talk – Dept. of Infrastructure and Transport	Wednesday 9 Talk/ presentation	Novotel Hotel, Creek Street
Launch Party – Brisbane Development Association and UR[BNE]	Thursday 10 Networking event – party & discussion	Sparrow and Finch, Gresham Lane
Space Imagineers Anonymous	Informal discussions and Drinks – Three events 11, 23, 29	
Dulux emerging creative's drink and design trivia	Networking event	
Pehakucha Nigh Brisbane – AIA Special Edition	Slide presentations and talk	Powerhouse

Activity	Date and Description	Location and Date
Aperture (postcards to Brisbane) – closing part	Australian Institute of Architects National Conference	West end
Lazy Sunday Cycle	Sunday 13	Roma St and Northery St – inner Brisbane
Alleyway Project – Street Theatre (two events)	Monday 14 & Tuesday 15 Street Theatre	Winn Lane, Valley
MapAttack - UR[BNE]	Wednesday 16	
Green Star Community Tool Launch	Friday 18	
Sustainable Drinks A monthly event	Friday 18 for networking	Little Stanley Street City
Queensland Heritage Festival 2012 The National Trust of Australia	Friday 18 Food Bus Tour of Ipswich heritage architecture	Ipswich
Musical Chairs and chair bombing	Saturday 19 Guerilla tactics for street furniture	City Hall – King George Square
We Like Bikes – Brisbane City Council	Sunday 20 Newstead/ Tennerife Bikeway	
Permablitz #20 by Permablitz	Sunday 20 Planting and Education session	West End Community Gardens
Indesign up-late	Thursday 24 Talk	James St the Valley
City of Dreams Symposium	Urban Design Alliance (UDAL)	The Block Creative Industries Precinct, QUT Kelvin Grove
Changing Lanes (laneway party)	Friday 25 Networking and Art Projects including digital technology based projects.	Brookes and Hyndes St, Valley
Indie Twilight Markets – BrisStyle	Friday 25 Street Markets	King George Square, City
Style over Speed	Friday 25 Bike ride	King George Square to West End Brew Bar
Blank canvas	Friday 25 Closing event – active art on blank canvases & a range of white surfaces	Brew Bar, Burnett Lane
Plants workshop - permablitz	Saturday 26	West End Library, West End
West End Twilight Markets	Saturday 26	Boundary Street West End
Speed Date a sustainable designer Alternative Technology Assoc.	Saturday 26 Networking and learning session	State Library QLD Southbank
She'll Be Apples	Ongoing throughout May An Art	

Activity	Date and Description	Location and Date
	installation Simple reimaging of Brisbane's backstreets	
Brisbane Park(ing) Day book launch	Sunday 27	Latrobe Terrace, Paddington
Parties in the carpark – up late designs		James Street
Games Night	Thursday 31 Giant public board games in city square	King George Square, City
Ongoing and Related Events		
Diner en blanc	1 st September 2012 International event, mass crowd dining out in the city, in white.	Location a secret till the night - South Bank Brisbane
Postcards to Brisbane – wish you were here – Art Exhibition		Grey St Exhibition
Platform – RBH Busway – Art installment		
Goodbye Gallery Hello City		
Make My City Work Property Council of Australia	Online Forum	
EMAGN2012 Exhibition		
AIA National Conference		
Asia Pacific Design Library Lecture Series		
Stop for Art	Art installations on the Goodwill Bridge pedestrian/bike bridge	

While activities were not restricted to inner Brisbane, most took place either in the city or surrounding inner suburbs (shown on the following map), the two main exceptions were Griffith University Campus for the debate and Ipswich heritage tour (not shown on this map).

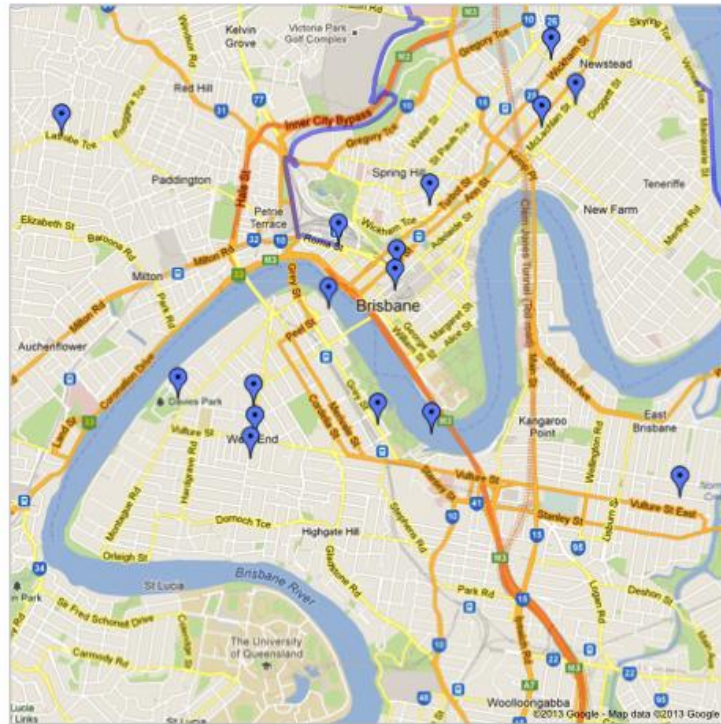


Figure 1: Map of inner city UR[BNE] Festival 2012 activities

3. Findings: The UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival 2012

The UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival 2012 provide rich examples of interactions between planning and urban design professionals, artists and community who want to re-invigorate the underutilised parts of the city. As one of the interviewees from the organising committee explained:

The general idea in the beginning was to start mini urban interventions and projects in Brisbane and around Brisbane, particularly in Brisbane's underutilised public spaces. To bring awareness to spaces, to re-imagine the way we use spaces, to generate debate. Or, try to use demonstration projects to bring about a change of policy. The first six months were slow going so that is when the festival idea came into being; it gave us a deadline and coincided with a number of other activities (Int. 2).

The UR[BNE] Festival sought to have an impact in four ways: to develop dreams, to create, to build, and to enliven. They sought to engage a diverse group of people who shared this vision: creatives, academics, technology designers, artists and beyond. UR[BNE] Design Collective was able to bring these interests together and support each other.

From the emails we were getting, people were trying to do similar things in Brisbane. Actually turning your idea into a reality, an event, was something people were finding really challenging. So I think the power of the UR[BNE] collective has been in that support, building confidence and networking, putting people in touch with like-minded people (Int. 2).

The UR[BNE] Design Collective represents a group of urban planners and designers interested in exploring new ways of planning, communicating and activating spaces. For some it presented an opportunity to break from frustrations of bureaucratic processes or procedures and 'do something', create an action, promote new ways to go about their professional practice.

The world café method (IAP2, 2006) was used to generate projects and interest in the UR[BNE] Festival at the Ideas Café (see Figure 7.2). The café brought together interested parties from the planning, arts, and community sectors on 1 March 2012. Widely advertised through social media, the Rabbit Hole Ideation Café was packed for the event with a diverse and excited crowd.



Figure 2: Images of the Ideas Café Night Source: UR[BNE] Prezi

At the Ideas Café, anyone wanting to pitch an idea was offered the opportunity. Six people stepped forward and gave a short outline of their ideas. The ideas included: an art installation in otherwise under-utilised streets or urban spaces of Brisbane using paper as the medium; a bike ride to promote cycling as an everyday mode of transport not just a lycra clad exercise event; urban camping with a mass of people sleeping out in public city places; the temporary redesign or recreation of an inner city street; and live bands performing under the north bank motorways.

Each idea was assigned a table and the people moved between these tables offering ideas for planning, logistics, funding, and support. All ideas were recorded on large sheets of blank paper. The presenters' own interest in their projects grew through the process, some reflecting on the night that it had 'just been a vague idea but now it feels like it can really

happen' (observation notes). Not all the ideas from the evening came to fruition; however, notably, some such as the 'style over speed' bike ride (see Figure 7.3) and the paper art installation called 'She'll Be Apples' did during the festival in May. According to one of the interviewees: 'It was about giving people who had an idea, but didn't know how to progress it, the opportunity to get help to bring it to fruition' (Int. 1).



Figure 3: Photo of the first and highly successful Style Over Speed ride

The social network created through UR[BNE] drew people together face to face at this event, and discussion continued through social media afterwards. Some of the other festival events included: Edible Streets Tour, Parking Day, She'll Be Apples (art installation), Popup Lunch, Musical Chairs, Blank canvas, Dîner en Blanc, film screenings, and presentations.

Parking Day followed the pattern of the international Parking Day movement, which involves the repurposing of car-parking space to something interesting and fun that promotes other modes of transport. Parking Day is an example of how UR[BNE] often took the approach of working with existing ideas that had been successful in other cities and repurposed them for Brisbane.

She'll Be Apples, a paper art installation, was a project developed by two artists. They set out to use art to inspire people to look at the city in a new way.

We'd consider it a success. The installation itself was made up of a couple of hundred paper apples that were cut from books and hung from trees. That the handmade nature of the installation would re-enforce the idea for showing love for the area: Who would spend hours making hundreds of apples for a street if they didn't care about the area? A. (UR[BNE] Prezi)

Turning likes into action: the challenge of social media engagement

The UR[BNE] design collective established a web presence with Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr social media networks (see Figure 7.4). One of the interviewees explained this decision: ‘We had no money, we are all not-for-profit. So everything was volunteered, everything was through social media. That was the only way we could communicate’ (Int. 2).



Figure 4: Photo of Social media sites (UR[BNE] Prezi)

Through these media, the group attracted a large number of followers. The UR[BNE] Facebook group for those interested in the organisational aspects of the festival has 74 members. The organisers commented on their learning experience in the social media with the differences between Facebook groups and Facebook events each with a distinctly different purpose. The Facebook group was a collection of people interested in the organisational aspects of the festival, as well as an ongoing professional development interest in placemaking and urban festivals. Many of the posts for this site connected to other festivals and ideas for urban spaces from around the world, it provided a place to share and store ideas that could be relevant to the Brisbane experience. The Facebook events page related specifically to the activities of the Festival including the information and news about those events.

It was evident that their use of social media evolved as the year (2012) progressed. Each event was given its own Facebook event as shown in the figure below. Links were cross-

posted between events. The network was used to inform and inspire organisers, with the various events pages used to promote individual events or activities. Each event attracted other specific interest groups through Facebook (such as cyclist groups for style over speed), which encouraged participation and followers.

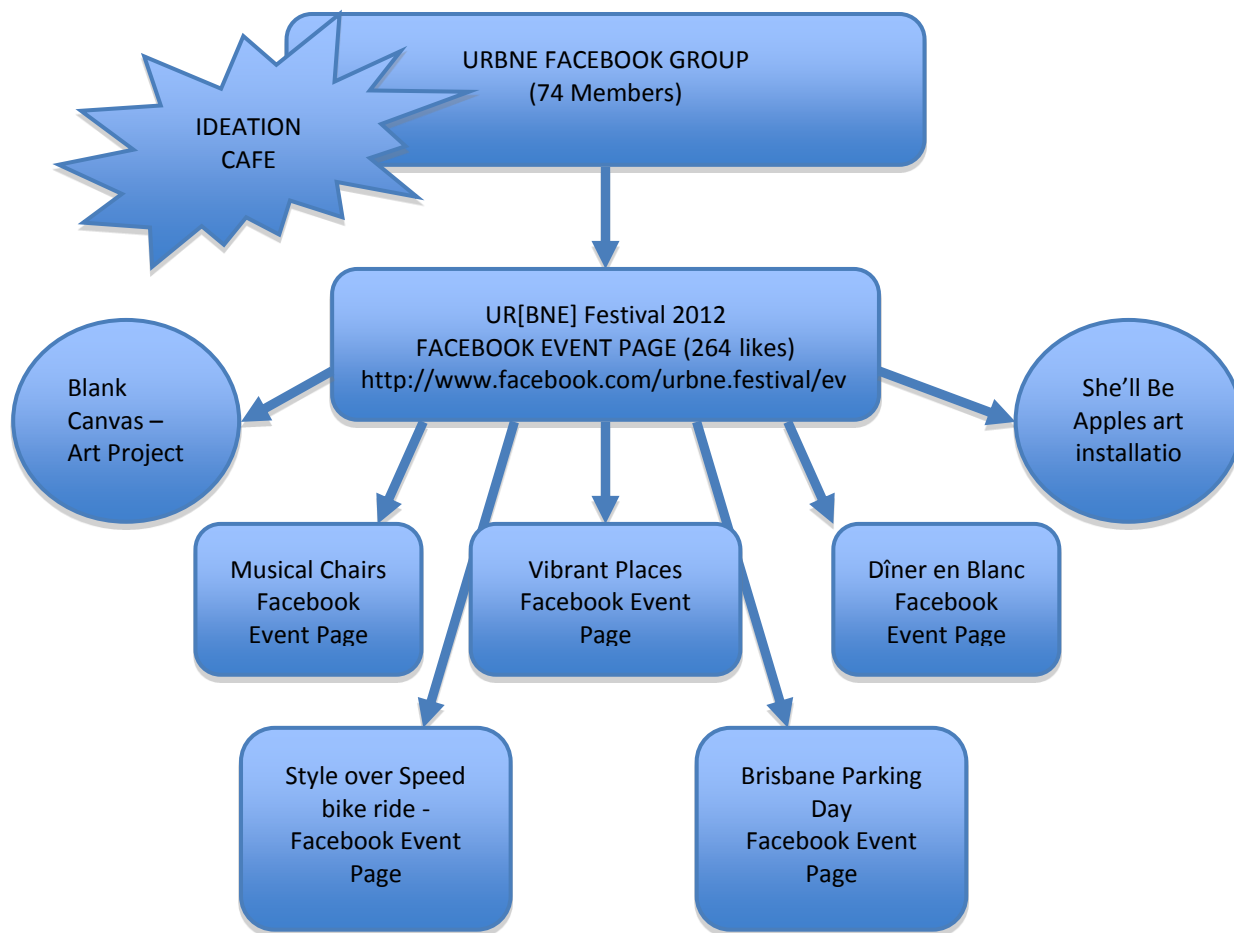


Figure 5: Structure of Facebook pages and groups

As mentioned in the earlier section, these followers have varying levels of commitment to the group and to social media more generally: ‘One of the biggest challenges is moving from likes to action. You have a 1000 likes and only three people to do the work’ (Int. 1). The three or four active organisers submitted most content posted on the Facebook site with a few other individual posts coming from other interested members or friends.

Because 2012 was the inaugural year of the UR[BNE] Festival, there were several ‘teething’ issues, such as discovering the most effective way to get exposure for the group’s

social media sites and generate public interest in using the tools on those sites. Finding the right network to connect to the right community was also a challenge.

You have to get the mix right. The Tumblr page didn't work very well for us... We have learnt a lot since we first started using it [social media]. It is definitely a very powerful tool, but I think it is something we could have used a lot more. You really need to stay on top of your likes and keywords. (Int. 2)

Social media was used to provide information about upcoming events and to later reflect on the events. The organisers were hoping to engender an ongoing interest in activating spaces. It was hoped that there would be enough interest in the concepts and inspiration for other people to organise and run their own events within the festival.

The Pop Up Lunch (see Figure 7.6) was the type of outcome they were after.

Inspired by UR[BNE] Festival, a group of us at work, in collaboration with surrounding businesses, will be temporarily transforming a rather unattractive and uninviting courtyard in between our block of office buildings into a place where people choose to have lunch, hang out, have fun and get to know the neighbours. In doing so we are aiming to prompt people to rethink the purpose and current use of this everyday space, whilst creating an opportunity to bring people together, and possibly catalyse new connections/relationships. S.B (UR[BNE] Prezi)



Figure 6: Pop up lunch sourced from (UR[BNE] Prezi)

New professional action learning and creative inspiration

Professional action learning is demonstrated through the activities of the UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival. The Design Collective is about places, how people interact within them, and the dynamics that are significant for people living in and experiencing them. Relationships with formal planning frameworks were established informally by the inclusion of planners from a variety of sectors as participants in activities and events. Building awareness of the festival within Brisbane's planning sector has seen the inclusion of the UR[BNE] Festival in the City Council's design process for the 2013 Brisbane Ideas Festival. One of the organisers commented:

... the third component [of the Ideas Festival] is a street fest. When we [*UR[BNE] and City Council*] sat down and talked about it, we said wow this is practically what we are doing with UR[BNE]. So we have decided that it makes sense that we do it together. So it will probably be as partners, so we keep that recognition. UR[BNE] is about much more than just the city centre, which the City Centre Masterplan is looking at. But we want to keep our name there so people recognise it. (Int. 2)

The activation of ideas through the UR[BNE] Festival was satisfying for the participating planners, who can sometimes be frustrated by a disconnection between ideas and change within the city. The festival provided an opportunity for individuals (both urban design professionals and the general community) to pursue passions and interests and see underused parts of the city come alive. This was achieved through art installations, activities in spaces, reinventions of spaces and temporary changes to spaces. Two examples of this were using Creek Street, a small private street for the launch party, and Pop-Up Lunch in between office buildings.

The collective promoted the festival before and after it was held, with presentations to local professional associations such as Urban Design Alliance (UDAL), Business Development Association (BDA), and Pecha Kucha Brisbane. These events served to extend the interest and social network connections for UR[BNE]. An advantage for UR[BNE] is the distinction the group received from the Brisbane City Council. Yet, the group also included members from state and local government and will be working directly with the City Council on future projects. Supported with some small sponsorship, the group had a good relationship with the local Council, which was seen to be mutually beneficial.

4. Discussion

The UR[BNE] Design Collective and Festival provided a case study of urban designers and planners working together with the broader community to activate places. It is about urban planners enacting their planning values (Laurian & Shaw, 2009) in most cases outside of their professional roles, in practical ways. UR[BNE] offers an exciting way to participate with the social, digital and physical elements of the city to enliven place, in ways that would hearten Jacobs (1961), Gehl (2006), and Putnam (2001). UR[BNE] demonstrates the way that urban technology (particularly social media for this discussion) affords a hybrid approach to connecting the physical and digital city.

In this case study, both physical actions and virtual interactions worked like nerves within an organism, messaging and directing. Through this network UR[BNE] was able to activate otherwise inactive places, creating an energy or stimulating the city. This urban acupuncture interaction is part of an ongoing treatment. Its positive effects within the community and the planning profession of Brisbane are evident, with its initial success encouraging plans for 2013 by both UR[BNE] and Council.

At the beginning of this paper, we asked if social networks could dynamically affect the development and design of public spaces? In response we can consider how the UR[BNE] Design Collective used social media tied specifically to events in the physical world. Social media added power and significance to place-making in each of these instances. To build community and social capital the process of sharing was explicit in the success of the festival. The events that carried on beyond the festival, such as the Style over Speed Bike Ride, demonstrate the success and connection built through the events and the social media support. Social media provided a place for ideas and thinking to be shared, contributing to ongoing professional learning and action. Social media also linked events to create face-to-face interactions and dialogue, for instance, through the movie screenings and presentations to three professional groups: Brisbane Development Association, the Urban Design Alliance, and Brisbane Petukucha.

The second question was: what elements need to be considered to develop and maintain these networks? In the UR[BNE] Design Collective levels of participation varied, there was evidence of distinct participant categories such as lurkers, champions, and creators. Lurkers are those members who look, but do not actively involve themselves in the discussion online or in contributing information. Champions support, encourage and spread the word further through their own networks, often with high levels of vested interests in the project. The

highest-level organisers were the most prolific contributors to social media, and as noted by the organisers, and it took a significant commitment on their part to make it a success. Further investigation is required into the behaviour of the social media lurkers and the influence on them as professionals or community members. For example, are there benefits in using social media platforms that allow lurkers to have a vicarious connection and time to digest the content posted before and after the events?

Creating action is powerful means of connecting social media and placemaking. UR[BNE] Urban Festival provides an example of participation moving from purely informing and consulting to engagement through action. Considering the third question: - within the formal structures of planning, how do these networks function to enhance urban places?

We can see that physical involvement in placemaking connects people to place in two key ways: it provides them with an experience and sense of ownership, which add meaning to place (Oldenburg, 1989), and it provides them with a means to contribute to the improvement and positive experience of their neighbourhood (Jacobs, 1961). However, through social media, like-minded, but otherwise disconnected, professionals, artists, and community members can be connected. The connections and conversations between participants in this case study broadened the participants' perspectives about their city, its spaces and other people. The involvement of the planners from local consultancies and local and state government meant that the network provided an opportunity for debate. The conversations of the broader group of professionals and community can be engaged, acknowledged and inform the daily practice of planning across the city. This aligns with the principles of CPT (Sager, 2009) involving a much larger set of stakeholders in discussions about how cities are formed and enlivened. Communication channels become clearer, with space for more voices to be included in ongoing discussions about cities: social media also allows for the development of a culture of discussion of planning issues across a city and beyond.

In this case study, social media tools were instrumental in developing and extending the links between like-minded professionals, artists, and community members. The social media provided a forum to share ideas and to have an ongoing discussion about places. The planning professionals actively participated in activities that aimed to enliven the places throughout Brisbane that is part of their professional area of responsibility. This process created a vested interest for those planners and developed in them a deeper understanding of the elements that give meaning to those places, which in turn can be used for policy development associated with those places. The stronger communication linkages with

community may help to build relationships that can facilitate discussion on issue specific planning matters as required (Evans-Cowley, 2010b).

The festival itself as well as connected social media also allowed for community involvement in an active way, discussion about issues but also physical activities within places and in the case of cycling – through places. This engagement and experience of place presents an alternative way to think about consultation, beyond words and text towards inclusive action.

The limitations of this research in terms of time and scope, leave further questions unanswered about the perceptions of participants, before and after activities. Would participants be more likely to engage in local planning matters? These could be investigated in further research.

5. Conclusions

There is evidence of a new wave of communication, interaction, and interdisciplinary connection occurring in Brisbane. UR[BNE] is part of a stimulus for re-energising the city to take on the challenges of a growing population and all the problems that this presents. The UR[BNE] Design Collective provides a valuable space for Brisbane's planners and community to engage in discussion, debate, and professional growth. Through a series of physical actions in inner city Brisbane, supported by an ongoing online and face-to-face community dialogue, a successful urban acupuncture treatment was applied. This presents a new approach for urban planning, a *Communicative urban acupuncture* that broadens communication outputs and inputs, augmented through digital technology (specifically ICT), and strategically targets interventions across the city. Defined as an approach that through the use of digital social networks and interactions involves citizens and planners in place activations that stimulate and reinvigorate place, in order to create meaningful relationships within urban settings.

This hybrid of physical and virtual conversations and actions has helped to enliven inner city Brisbane and beyond, gauged through the positive media and council response, interest in future festivals and plans for 2013, levels of participation and interest levels in online discussions. The Design Collective and Festival successfully worked at encouraging and supporting, the interest and energy of professionals and community to activate and enliven urban places across the city. UR[BNE] Design Collective illustrates the utility of

social media to create an ongoing dialogue that conceptualises the planning role beyond regulation and development (static physical planning) to include a more communicative action oriented process of planning and city creation (action planning and placemaking) that considers the holistic health of the city.

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